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Counseling and Testing Center helps university students with college and career plans

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COUNSELING AND TESTING CENTER
HELPS UNIVERSITY STUDENTS
WITH COLLEGE AND CAREER PLANS

By Dorothy Thurston
UM Information Services

MISSOULA--

"Who am I?" and "Where am I going?" are questions University of Montana students often ask themselves. Some of them are assisted in finding answers at the UM Counseling and Testing Center.

The Center, at 740 Eddy St., Missoula, functions as a phase of the UM student personnel services to help students in formulating their vocational and educational plans. Counselors at the center also assist students in social and personal problems.

Dr. Robert E. Gorman, director of the center, heads a staff of seven, including three professional counselors, three graduate students majoring in counselor education and a secretary-receptionist.

Said Dr. Gorman, "This is a place where students may come to discuss freely and in confidence any problem causing anxiety.

"Lack of realistic educational goals, failure in course work, misinformation or lack of understanding of opportunities in the world of work, drug-taking, loneliness and worry are common causes of anxiety," said Dr. Gorman.

As the world of work becomes more complex with more than 26,000 occupations, it is becoming increasingly more difficult for the student to be knowledgeable about the necessary aptitudes, interests, training requirements and opportunities for professional success," said Dr. Gorman.

"It is not uncommon for students to change majors several times during their college careers," Dr. Gorman explained. "Counseling can help the student to avoid wasting time in achieving satisfactory future career goals."

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Citing one example, Dr. Gorman said, "I recently saw a freshman woman who had declared psychology as a major. She had earlier thought of this field as rather glamorous when portrayed on television. However, when she realized that mathematics and statistics are essential for the major--which also requires a Ph.D. degree involving about 9 or 10 years of college--she decided this goal was unrealistic. Through therapeutic counseling, she has decided that a major in social welfare is a far more realistic goal for her."

Counseling interviews are scheduled by appointment for about 50 minutes each. Counseling, usually a one-to-one relationship with a counselor and a client, has a purpose of helping the student to grow in self understanding so he can better/with his intellectual and personal resources," said Dr. Gorman.

A counselor may administer aptitude, interest, achievement or personality tests, as well as help students "talk through" their problems.

Counseling services are free to UM students and their spouses. No student is required to undergo counseling at the center except one who has been dropped for academic reasons and who is seeking readmission. These former students are referred to the center by the academic department deans and chairmen.

According to Dr. Gorman, the center sees about 750 students a year for counseling. This represents from 10 to 12 per cent of the student body.

The average number of individual counseling sessions total about five, exclusive of time used by the student, who takes individual psychological tests.

The UM Counseling and Testing Center also has an extensive file of occupational and career information to which the student may refer. In addition, the center is the official testing agency for UM and vicinity, administering such tests as the Graduate Record Examination and those published by the American College Testing Program.

"We are understaffed," said Dr. Gorman. "There should be at least one full-time counselor for every thousand students. In the future, I hope we can add staff enough to reach out to students rather than wait for them to come to us."

The UM Counseling Center concept started immediately after World War II when the Veterans' Administration (VA) rented space from UM and employed personnel for counseling WW II veterans.

In the early 1950s, the University assumed the duties of the VA when it realized that students besides veterans needed help in making realistic decisions.